

## CAUGHT BETWEEN CHARACTER AND RACE: ‘TEMPERAMENT’ IN KANT’S LECTURES ON ANTHROPOLOGY

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**Abstract.** Focusing on Immanuel Kant’s lectures on anthropology, the essay endeavours to address long-standing concerns regarding both the relationship between these empirical investigations and Kant’s better-known universalism, and more pressingly, between Kant’s own racism on display in the lectures, and his simultaneous promotion of a universal moral theory that would unhesitatingly condemn such attitudes.

This essay is framed by a question of increasing relevance to contemporary Kant scholarship, namely, the relationship between Kant’s personal racism and his philosophical system. The question is straightforward: do Kant’s personal biases infect his best-known philosophical writings and if so, must the philosophy be rejected as a set of tainted goods. My approach to this problem starts from Kant’s sense that the empirical science of anthropology encompasses all other objects of human enquiry, even, therefore, transcendental investigations concerning cognition and freedom; it starts, in other words, from a presumed connection between two very different kinds of enquiry. My special focus here will be on Kant’s lectures on anthropology. In this discussion, I examine the role played by temperament as a hinge between the physically determined, embodied self and the free moral agent. This parallels the relationship under question regarding the connection between Kant’s racist views (as expressed in these lectures and elsewhere), and his philosophical promotion of a transcendental, universally prescriptive system by which all humans can seek to answer the basis questions of knowledge, morality, and religion. When seen from this vantage point,

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I contend, we will finally be in a good position for addressing the problem posed by a racist Kant and the universal moral theory he proposed.

### 1.0 KANT'S RACISM: REVISITING CHARLES MILL'S CRITIQUE

At this point there are already a number of commentators, both within and without mainstream Kant scholarship, who have begun to look more closely at the relationship between Immanuel Kant's much-vaunted 'Critical philosophy' – those works produced after the appearance of his *Critique of Pure Reason*<sup>1</sup> in 1781 – and his career-long engagement with works in natural history and especially with travel-based accounts of the peoples and customs of far-off lands (between Kant's own writings and student lecture notes from his courses on anthropology and physical geography, researchers have close to 3000 pages worth of material to consider in this connection). Reflecting on the connection between Kant's consistent and long-standing remarks on differences of gender and race, and the necessary role these subjects of difference must play in the social and political history of the species, Eduardo Mendieta concludes that for Kant

Both sexual and racial difference are expressions of the essential antagonism, if not enmity, that leads humanity to rise above nature to rationally self-regarding moral dignity. In other words, sexual difference and racial distinction are tools, elements of the design of nature, that instigate a discord, disharmony, conflict, antagonism, and quarrelsomeness that leads humans to rise from the state of nature to the state of civil society.<sup>2</sup>

This sort of reasoning remains, however, under-discussed and it continues to sit uncomfortably within the wider breadth of Kant scholarship as a whole. Indeed, it is still safe to say that the majority of Kant specialists remain either unfamiliar with

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans Kemp Smith Norman) (Palgrave MacMillan [1929] 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Eduardo Mendieta, 'Geography is to History as Woman is to Man: Kant on Sex, Race, and Geography' in Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (eds) *Reading Kant's Geography* (SUNY Press 2011) 345 at 347. Important precursors to Mendieta's discussion of Kant and gender are in Pauline Kleingeld, 'The Problematic Status of Gender-Neutral Language in the History of Philosophy: The Case of Kant' (1993) 25 *The Philosophical Forum* 134; Allegra de Laurentiis, 'Kant's Shameful Proposition: A Hegel-Inspired Criticism of Kant's Theory of Domestic Right' (2000) 40(3) *International Philosophical Quarterly* 297; and Jane Kneller, 'Kant on Sex and Marriage Right' in Paul Guyer (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press 2006) 447. For path-breaking work on Kant and race, see Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, 'The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race" in Kant' in Emmanuel Eze (ed) *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Blackwell Publishing 1997) 103; Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant's Second Thoughts on Race' (2007) 57 *The Philosophical Quarterly* 573; and Robert Bernasconi, 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism' in Thomas Lott and Julie Ward (eds) *Philosophers on Race* (Blackwell Publishing 2002) 145; Robert Bernasconi, 'Will the Real Kant Please Stand Up: The Challenge of Enlightenment Racism to the Study of the History of Philosophy' (2003) 117 *Radical Philosophy* 13; Robert Bernasconi, 'Kant and Blumenbach's Polyps: A Neglected Chapter in the History of the Concept of Race' in Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore (eds) *The German Invention of Race* (SUNY Press 2006) 73. An invaluable overview of late eighteenth century race theory, including numerous original source materials from Kant and others, is in Jon Mikkelsen, *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth Century Writings* (SUNY Press 2013).

or are simply uninterested in Kant's 'regretful' and 'distressing' attitudes toward women and non-whites, seeing these as a reflection of Kant's times more than anything else.<sup>3</sup> And while some have argued otherwise, it remains a matter of firm conviction within the scholarly community that such remarks cannot in any significant sense impugn the great epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic achievements of the critical system. Reporting on this, Charles Mills has sought to explicitly problematise that conviction, challenging Kant's readers to find textual support for its defence. As Mills frames it,

either Kant's racial views do not affect his philosophy at all (the extreme position), or they do not affect it in its *key/central/essential/basic* claims (the more moderate position). The assumption, obviously, is that we have a principled, non-question-begging way to demarcate what is central from what is peripheral to his philosophy, and a similarly principled way of showing how the racial views (and, of course, their implications) fail to penetrate to this inner circle.<sup>4</sup>

What Mills wants to know from Kant scholars, in other words, is how we might justify any claims regarding the centrality (or not) of a given text and then, assuming this case has been convincingly made, how we might demonstrate that these texts are not 'violated' by any contact or penetration of the racial or, we can add, misogynistic views held by Kant.

This is of course quite a lot to ask, and so far there have been only piecemeal efforts on the part of Kant scholars (whether these have been done with Mills specifically in mind or

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<sup>3</sup> Within Anglophone Kant scholarship this is largely generational, and it stems in the main from historical factors. First, there remains a pervasive bias against 'history of philosophy' within Analytic-dominated philosophy departments and professional organisations, a fact that has led many Kant scholars (and this is especially true in the case of those at work during the 1970s and 80s), to adopt both the style-form and focus of Analytic philosophy's attention to epistemic issues at the cost of other areas. Second, without German reading skills or, for some texts, access to the Kant archive in Marburg, Germany, there has been a general lack of available material regarding Kant's considerations of gender and race, since the wide availability of critical English editions of these works is a relatively recent phenomenon. To put this in better perspective, the student notes from Kant's lectures on anthropology were only published in English translation by Cambridge in 2012, and a complete English translation of Kant's Physical Geography course – an edition acknowledged by the editors to be corrupted – was only published as part of a separate Cambridge collection of Kant's scientific works in that same year. The original German source material – from 17 extant manuscripts – from which a critical English edition of Kant's lectures on Physical Geography might be based, remains unpublished apart from a 2009 edition of Kant's lectures from 1758/59 (volume 26.1 of Kant's complete works). For detailed information regarding Kant's lectures see two pieces by Werner Stark, the editor in charge of the German Academy edition of Kant's collected works, 'Historical Notes and Interpretive Questions About Kant's Lectures on Anthropology' in Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds) *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press 2003) 15, and 'Kant's Lectures on "Physical Geography": A Brief Outline of Its Origins, Transmission, and Development: 1745–1805' in Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (eds) *Reading Kant's Geography* (SUNY Press 2011) 69. That said, the availability of texts is one thing, a genuine shift towards inclusion of these works requires professors being willing and prepared to include them in their teaching and research.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Mills, 'Kant's *Untermenschen*' in Andrew Valls (ed) *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (Cornell University Press 2005) 169 at 175.

not) to address this issue. Part of the difficulty stems from the location of Kant's comments on gender and race. We can start with a general look at Kant's publishing history to get a sense of this aspect of the problem. It is, for example, typical for Kant scholars to draw a dividing line between the 'Pre-Critical' Kant and the Critical one, with the bookends for the latter period falling roughly from the 1781 publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the appearance of the 'Metaphysics of Morals' in 1797.<sup>5</sup> Kant was, however, an old man – at least by eighteenth-century standards – in 1781, and the bulk of his professional career already lay behind him by then, given that he had begun university teaching in the mid-1750s and had written his first book in 1746. In the 1750s and 60s Kant was lecturing as a 'Privatdozent' and publishing works on science and metaphysics at a steady pace. It was only in 1770, with his assumption of the Chair in Logic and Metaphysics (his first salaried position), that he began to formulate the grounds for a new theory of ideas and cognition that would culminate in the epistemological programme laid out in the first *Critique*. That this would be followed by a discussion of moral reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason*<sup>6</sup> in 1788, and an account of our special regard for art and nature in the *Critique of Judgment*<sup>7</sup> in 1790, has forever dubbed these topics as forming together the heart of the 'critical' system produced by Kant. When Kant published an account of rational faith in 1793's 'Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason',<sup>8</sup> it seemed that he had at last covered each of the questions first described in the closing pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. 'All the interests of my reason', Kant had there explained, 'speculative as well as practical, combine in the three following questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What ought I do? (3) What may I hope?'.<sup>9</sup> Kant would, however, come to add to this list. As he later put it, philosophy

can be reduced to the following questions: What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope? What is the human being? Metaphysics answers the first question, morals the second, religion the third, and anthropology the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this anthropology, because the first three questions relate to the last one.<sup>10</sup>

While this might lead us to believe that Kant's interest in anthropology grew only *after* the critical system had been established, this would be a mistake. It would also call into

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<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'The Metaphysics of Morals' in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy* (trans Mary J Gregor) (Cambridge University Press 1996) 353.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (trans Lewis White Beck) (MacMillan [1956] 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (trans Werner Pluhar) (Hackett 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason' in *Immanuel Kant: Religion and Rational Theology* (trans George di Giovanni) (Cambridge University Press 1996) 57.

<sup>9</sup> Kant above note 1 at 635 or A804/B832. As per standard practice I cite Kant's works with volume and page number separated by a full colon. These citations will all correspond to the complete works of Immanuel Kant as published in German by Walter de Gruyter: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols (Walter de Gruyter Berlin 1900–). The exceptional citation practice is that used for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which uses an A/B system to indicate the 1781/1787 editions. English editions used for direct citations will be identified at their first instance in the text with a corresponding reference to its location in Kant's complete works as described.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Jäsche Logic' in Michael Young (ed and trans) *Lectures on Logic* (Cambridge University Press 1992) 538 at 9:25.

question the stated importance of anthropology as the one topic capable of encompassing the main foci of the critical system. In fact it is precisely in Kant's assessment of anthropology as a field capable of providing an encompassing report on the nature of human life that we are finally able to discern the link between anthropology and the critical system, namely, human being itself, in its materially determined and empirically observed existence, but also in its spontaneous or free moral character thought to lie at its basis.<sup>11</sup> I will develop this point more carefully below, for now we must continue to get a bit more of the context of Kant's anthropological investigations in view.

Kant had been interested in questions related to racial and sexual difference long before he had begun the work of transforming metaphysics into a science oriented by questions regarding the limits and extent of human cognition. The tenor of his remarks regarding the role of women in relation to men were, moreover, consistent from his first published discussion of them in 1764's 'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime'<sup>12</sup> to his account of the 'Character of the Sexes' in 1798's 'Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View'.<sup>13</sup> Kant's racism toward non-European races, with special negative attention paid by him to black Africans, was similarly constant across much of this timeframe. But while these views were expressed both before and during the critical period, Kant's various comments regarding, for example, Negroes as a stupid,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On this topic see especially Brian Jacobs, 'Kantian Character and the Problem of a Science of Humanity' in Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds) *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press 2003) 105.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöller (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 18.

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöller (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 231.

<sup>14</sup> After reporting comments made by a 'Negro carpenter', Kant writes:

There might be something here worth considering, except for the fact that this scoundrel was completely black from head to foot, a distinct proof that what he said was stupid.

This remark is in the 'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime' at 61 at 2:225. The 'Observations' were heavily influenced in these parts of the discussion by David Hume's essay 'Of National Characters' and indeed Kant cited this piece directly when remarking on the overall lack of talent or even ambition towards self-improvement on the part of the many thousands of freed black Africans, and this in contrast to those whites

who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. So essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to colour.

(See 59 at 2:253; see also David Hume, 'Of National Characters' in Eugene Miller (ed) *David Hume: Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* (Liberty Fund Inc. [1777] (1985)) 197 at 208 n 10). Kant self-consciously styled the 'Observations' as a piece of popular philosophy and the piece was in fact both popular and successful in making Kant known beyond university circles; subsequent editions appeared without emendation by Kant in 1766, 1771, 1797, and 1799.

lazy,<sup>15</sup> stinking<sup>16</sup> race, as a race incapable of political self-determination,<sup>17</sup> appeared in none of the major texts associated with Kant's critical philosophy. These sorts of comments were instead recorded by students in Kant's university courses, jotted down by Kant in his personal notes on anthropology, or published in the aforementioned 'Observations' or as various off-hand remarks in essays from 1775 and the mid-1780s.<sup>18</sup> It is thus the location of Kant's racist comments more than perhaps anything else that has led to the sense of their lying outside the core tenets of Kant's philosophical system.

Let us suppose, however, that Mills's first task is most simply met by identifying those works produced between 1781 and 1790 as the core of Kant's critical system. The case has already been made – as seen in Mendieta's remark cited above – by a number of scholars that the penetration of Kant's views on race into the timeframe of the critical system occurs via Kant's early support of colonialism in light of its positive role in the cultural and moral progress of the species as a whole.<sup>19</sup> This view could

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<sup>15</sup> 'Humid warmth is beneficial to the robust growth of animals in general and, in short, this results in the Negro, who is well suited to his climate, namely strong, fleshy, supple, but who, given the abundant provision of his mother land, is lazy, soft and trifling' ('Of the Different Races of Human Beings' (1775) at 2:438). This is only one of dozens of references by Kant to the 'laziness' brought out in peoples – Africans, Caribbeans, South Sea Islanders, Tahitians – as a result of a southerly geographical location with abundant natural resources.

<sup>16</sup> There was continuous speculation regarding the biological basis of black skin. Kant reported on the state of debates in his Physical Geography lectures and by 1775's essay on race seems to have settled on the chemical composition of the blood. Since Negroes had heavy, iron-filled blood, he argued, the precipitation of this through the skin caused all Negroes to stink; see Kant, 'Of the Different Races of Human Beings' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 92 at 2:438. An excellent overview of changing European attitudes toward non-whites in the wake of colonialism and the subsequent search for a scientific basis for skin colour is provided by Renato Mazzolini, 'Skin Color and the Origin of Physical Anthropology, 1640–1850' in Susanne Lettow (ed) *Reproduction, Race, and Gender in Philosophy and the Early Life Sciences* (SUNY Press 2014) 81.

<sup>17</sup> 'Negroes are not capable of any further civilization' (Anthropology Lectures (1777–78) at 25:843). 'The Negro can be disciplined and cultivated but never truly civilized; it all goes when [they are] back in the wild' and 'Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves, thus they are good only as slaves' (Kant's notes on Anthropology (mid-1780s) at 15:878).

<sup>18</sup> In Kant's review of Herder he took his former student to task for seeming to praise tranquillity over industrious self-improvement. Thus Kant asked:

Does the author really mean that if the happy inhabitants of Tahiti, never visited by more cultured nations, had been destined to live for thousands of centuries in their tranquil indolence, one could give a satisfying answer to the question why they exist at all, and whether it would not have been just as good to have this island populated by happy sheep and cattle as with human beings who are happy merely enjoying themselves?

See Immanuel Kant, 'Review of J.G. Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity*' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 121 at 142 at 8:65. I discuss Kant's review of Herder in relation to Kant's efforts to win Blumenbach's endorsement of Kant's racial theories in 'Kant and the Skull Collectors: German Anthropology from Blumenbach to Kant' in Corey Dyck and Falk Wunderlich (eds) *Kant and His German Contemporaries* (Cambridge University Press 2017, forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> On this see, especially, Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge University Press 2009); and Pauline Kleingeld, *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The*



be gleaned from Kant's history essays from the mid-1780s, that is, in 1784's 'Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Aim',<sup>20</sup> in Kant's critical reviews of his former student Herder's own work on history – *Ideas for the Philosophy of a History of Humanity* (1784)<sup>21</sup> – which were published in two parts in 1785,<sup>22</sup> and in his essay offering a 'Conjectural Beginning of Human History' in 1786.<sup>23</sup> We might note, moreover, that it is of no small significance that Kant was busy developing his moral theory during just these years. Apart from the short attacks on Herder, in 1785 Kant published both a new essay on racial difference, 'Determination of the Concept of the Human Race',<sup>24</sup> and the best-known statement of his universalist moral theory, the 'Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals'.<sup>25</sup> Kant returned to questions of both racial difference and historical understanding in 1788 with his work 'On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy',<sup>26</sup> the same year that he produced his major work on moral theory, the *Critique of Practical Reason*.<sup>27</sup> Kant's final remarks in this vein – at least within the timeframe I have set – appeared in section 83 of the *Critique of Judgment*, a discussion 'On the Ultimate Purpose that Nature has as a Teleological System'<sup>28</sup> which summarised the bulk of Kant's conclusions reached in the earlier essays. What the timing of these essays demonstrates is that while Kant was formulating the physical and even, when 'speculatively' considered, necessary grounds for the divergent social and political trajectories taken by the different races, he was also developing a theory of universal human autonomy and freedom of will. Reflecting on this, Thomas McCarthy concludes that 'in the context of Kant's philosophy of history, his natural-historical account of racial hierarchy merges into a philosophical and even

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*Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press 2012). By the mid-1790s Kant would explicitly condemn both colonialism and chattel slavery. On whether this constituted a change in Kant's attitudes toward non-Europeans, see two important papers: Pauline Kleingeld, 'Kant's Second Thoughts on Race' (2007) 57 *The Philosophical Quarterly* 573; and Robert Bernasconi, 'Kant's Third Thoughts on Race' in Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (eds) *Reading Kant's Geography* (SUNY Press 2011) 291. Further discussion can be found in Katrin Flikshuh and Lea Ypi (eds) *Kant and Colonialism: Historical and Critical Perspectives* (Oxford University Press 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History of Mankind with a Cosmopolitan Aim' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 108.

<sup>21</sup> J G Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (trans T Churchill) (Bergman [1800] 1966).

<sup>22</sup> Kant above note 18.

<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Conjectural Beginning of Human History' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 163.

<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Determination of the Concept of the Human Race' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 143.

<sup>25</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A German-English Edition* Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (eds and trans) (Cambridge University Press 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 192.

<sup>27</sup> Kant above note 6.

<sup>28</sup> Kant above note 7 at 317 at 5:429.

theological justification: it becomes part of a theodicy justifying God's ways to humankind'.<sup>29</sup>

But perhaps we can play devil's advocate here for the moment: is it fair to say as a result of such contiguity that there is a clear case of any part of the transcendental programme's being affected as a result? As Patrick Frierson argues, is it not the case that the problem here is effectively 'unidirectional', i.e. Kant might well apply teleological thinking to the question of racial difference, but even if this application ends up with a repugnant defence of historical inequality, the idea of a 'reflective' approach toward history is not itself axiomatically impugned.<sup>30</sup> In trying to answer this question I think that focusing on how we are to understand Kant's suggestion that anthropology encompasses metaphysics, morals, and religion will prove instructive. As I have already indicated, I believe that the manner in which we are to understand the 'encompassing' aspect of anthropology lies in Kant's continual appeal, within the Anthropology lectures, to the two-fold nature of the human as both material being and free moral agent. This fact alone, however, is not the real issue under investigation. The issue is this: given that Kant's lectures on Anthropology contain all manner of racist and sexist views, do these comments regarding the 'empirical' or 'natural' features of a human being impinge in any way on discussions of moral character? To put it in old-fashioned philosophical terms: does the body affect the soul in any substantive sense according to Kant? Kant is clear regarding the other direction of influence, that a good or evil character can affect everything from behaviour to appearance; that the soul lies behind and is indeed represented by one's empirical performance. But what of the body's influence? As we will shortly see, Kant's position on the body's connection to the intelligible or moral character of a person rests in large measure on his account of one's native 'temperament'. But first, let's set the stage with some history regarding Kant's courses.

## 2.0 KANT'S LECTURES IN CONTEXT

It is hard to overstate the immense popularity enjoyed by natural history during the long eighteenth century. Life scientists were busy formulating theories of generation and heredity, microscopists were revealing the amazing capacities of aphids to clone themselves and of hydra to regenerate whole bodies out of parts, and botanists struggled to wrestle 'intermediate' species into Linnaeus's binomial system of classification. In 1749 Georges Buffon published the first three of what would become 36 volumes devoted to a complete natural history – one newly dedicated to a view of nature that was driven by genealogical versus taxonomical concerns as its aim. These first volumes were translated into German by 1753 and were widely disseminated and discussed, especially in a large and busy seaport and university town like

<sup>29</sup> Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge University Press 2009) 51.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Frierson, *Kant's Questions: What is the Human Being?* (Routledge 2013) 113. Frierson takes Kant's influence on the subsequent development of scientific racism to be the real basis for concern regarding his views, regardless of whether scholars can agree on the relationship between Kant's lectures and the critical system.



Königsberg. Buffon's opening volumes began with a discussion of the cosmos and the features of the earth before turning to the first terrestrial mammal under consideration: the human being. In 1756 Kant sought special permission to teach a new Philosophy course, one he called 'Physical Geography', a course that would have to rely on a compilation of materials given that no such textbook was extant, let alone passed by the university's censor. Kant relied on a number of sources, especially Buffon, when putting together the materials for the course, and he followed a tripartite division that began with the earth's geological features including its seas and weather, and then took up specific discussions of minerals, plants, animals, and humankind, before turning to a discussion of 'Peculiarities of Nature Arranged Geographically: Asia, Africa, Europe, America'. As he outlined the plan in his course announcement for 1757, he would:

go through all the countries of the Earth in a geographical exposition, in order to explain those tendencies of human beings that are derived from the zone in which they live, the diversity of their prejudices and way of thinking, all insofar as this can serve to acquaint man better with himself; a brief idea of their arts, activities, and science; an account of the previously mentioned products of the countries at the appropriate places; the quality of air and so forth; in a word, everything that pertains to a physical examination of the Earth.<sup>31</sup>

The course was immediately popular and Kant taught it every year – 49 times in total – until he retired from teaching in 1796. This remained Kant's most successful course until 1772–73 when he took the bulk of his discussion of human beings out of the Physical Geography syllabus and created a separate, companion course on Anthropology. Of special significance for our purposes is to note that after this point, part three of the course would be described as a discussion of 'Peoples in Three Continents: Asia, Africa, America', with the former discussion of Europe now more or less having moved to the Anthropology course under a title borrowed from a section in 1764's 'Observations' essay, 'On National Character'.<sup>32</sup> From this point on, Anthropology became Kant's most popular course, and he continued to teach it every year until his retirement 24 years later. The emergence of the Anthropology course from the Physical Geography lectures is critical to understanding the environmental determinism at work within the course, for Kant never ceased including a discussion of humoral-based temperaments when describing the body's contributing factors for determining 'natural' characteristics associated with ethnicity, gender, and race. Just as important, however, is the manner in which the course was shaped by Kant, on the one hand, as the empirical component of a deeper metaphysical investigation

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<sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Magister Immanuel Kant's Plan and Announcement of a Series of Lectures on Physical Geography' in Eric Watkins (ed) *Immanuel Kant: Natural Science* (trans Olaf Reinhardt) (Cambridge University Press 2012) 393 at 2:9. Werner Stark, editor of Kant's lecture course on Physical Geography from 1759 in the German edition of the complete works of Kant, faithfully documents each of the probable texts, even direct quotations, which Kant appears to have relied on for his source material. I investigate Buffon's influence on Kant's approach to natural history and especially race in *Kant's Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Kant above note 11 at 52 or 2:243.

into the bases of moral behaviour, and on the other hand, by the transformation of what Kant understood to be the proper concern of metaphysics itself.

In 1765 Kant had begun to broadcast his concerns regarding the major problem facing metaphysics. Very much in the wake of Hume's influence on him at the time, Kant argued that the traditional objects of metaphysical enquiry – God, the soul, immortality – had become entangled with concepts surreptitiously taken from the natural sciences. This had led to all manner of mistaken and impossible investigations into the existence of 'forces', for example, at work in the intelligible world; investigations that amounted to mere speculation, as Kant saw it and, more broadly considered, to the general undermining of any remaining authority left to metaphysics, the one-time 'Queen of the sciences'. Kant intimated the shift in his thinking in the course announcement posted by him for the academic year 1765–66, but it would take the drafting of his Inaugural Dissertation, 'On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World'<sup>33</sup> in 1770, and much of the rest of that decade, to work out the details of a complete reorientation of metaphysics towards a science whose proper focus should be human reason. Insofar as much of this project entailed differentiating between knowable phenomena, the cognitive and material grounds upon which such phenomena rested, and the unknowable noumena lying beyond the boundaries of sense, Kant's regular courses on Metaphysics would themselves have to be changed. In particular, the time formerly spent on discussions of 'empirical psychology' would see that content's migration into the Anthropology course. This secured the sense on Kant's part that Anthropology should serve as the 'empirical pendant' to his focus on moral psychology in the Ethics lectures, a point underscored by his decision to run the courses in tandem with each other during the Winter semesters.<sup>34</sup> What this meant in practice, however, was that the Anthropology course offered a view of mankind not only in terms of environmental determinations so far as these figured in physiological and ethnic differences between races, genders, and nations, but also by way of attention to the 'natural' aspect of our empirically observed character – our 'empirical psychology' – alongside consideration of our intelligible or freely chosen, moral character as its hidden ground.

Indeed Kant was already moving in this direction in 1765 as the course announcement shows. Explaining that he would be compressing the usual time spent on the physical features of the earth, Kant announced that he would offer instead an expanded discussion of 'moral and political geography'. Kant held it that the physical

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<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World' in Lewis White Beck (ed and trans) *Kant's Latin Writings* (Peter Lang 1992) 119.

<sup>34</sup> Commentators on the Anthropology lectures have typically emphasised one of the various influences on the course (i.e. its relation to the courses on Metaphysics, Physical Geography, and Ethics) at the expense of others. Holly Wilson describes the interpretive differences between attention to Metaphysics versus Physical Geography in her book *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (SUNY Press 2006). For discussion of the connection between the Anthropology course and Kant's ethical theory, see especially Robert Loudon, *Kant's Impure Ethics* (Oxford University Press 2000); and Allen Wood, 'Unsocial Sociability: The Anthropological Basis of Kantian Ethics' (1991) 19(1) *Philosophical Topics* 325.

features – the ‘political geography’ – of a nation state, e.g. its access to water, the fertility of its soil, its proximity to trading routes, etc., determined the social and political fortunes of a nation, and served therefore as ‘the real foundation of history’; as he put it, ‘[w]ithout this foundation, history is scarcely distinguishable from fairy-tales’.<sup>35</sup> As he forecast the newly extended discussion of ‘moral geography’, the course would henceforth cover ‘*man*, throughout the world, from the point of view of the variety of his natural properties and the differences in that feature of man which is moral in character’, indeed,

the comparison of human beings with each other, and the comparison of man today with the moral state of man in earlier times, furnishes us with a comprehensive map of the human species.<sup>36</sup>

And here it bears reminding that for many eighteenth-century theorists, contact with ‘primitive’ peoples in far-off lands constituted a *de facto* view into Europe’s own past.

### 3.0 HUMOURAL THEORY AND THE CATEGORISATION OF MANKIND

Kant’s approach to the character of mankind developed in stages and differed in focus depending upon the context of his remarks. In each of his various discussions, however, it is clear that any discussion of ‘natural’ character was going to be understood against the backdrop of an environmental determinism with respect to the body’s defining humoural classification. It was Galen who had famously expanded the Hippocratic approach to humoural medicine, an expansion that would later be refined in light of Plato’s discussion in the *Timaeus*.<sup>37</sup> Eighteenth-century thinkers, however, needed to look no further than Linnaeus’s own classificatory schema for understanding the varieties of mankind. As Linnaeus identified them in the tenth edition of his *Systema naturae* (1758–59) they could be broken into four categories:

*Americanus*. Rufus, cholericus, rectus [red, choleric, upright]  
*Europæus*. Albus, sanguineus, torosus [white, sanguine, muscular]  
*Asiaticus*. Luridus, melancholicus, rigidus [yellow, melancholy, rigid]  
*Afer*. Niger, phlegmaticus, laxus [black, phlegmatic, relaxed]<sup>38</sup>

categories that were identical to the four regions discussed by Kant in the Physical Geography lectures. Kant had in fact described all manner of peoples within these

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, ‘M. Immanuel Kant’s Announcement of the Programme of His Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766’ in David Walford (ed and trans) *Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770* (Cambridge University Press 1992) 299 at 2:312.

<sup>36</sup> As above at 229 at 2:312–3.

<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* (trans Peter Kalkavage) (Focus 2001) 122 at 83b and following.

<sup>38</sup> Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae per Regna Tria Naturae* vol 1 (Laurentii Salvi Holmiae 1758–59) 20–2.

large regions, providing something akin to a nascent ethnology in many of his discussions.<sup>39</sup> When it came to a scientific account of racial variation, however, Kant insisted that there were only four races and readers saw that these could be once more indexed to the four regions and colours listed by Linnaeus.

It is perhaps easier to get a sense of the conceptual work done by such a schema by thinking first about plants, since even today we readily employ environmental determinism for understanding their nature. All plants are native only to a set of defined geographical regions, and their capacities and characteristics both reflect the climate and the soils – sandy, peaty, chalky, etc. – and set limits on their ability to flourish or even survive outside their native lands: tropical plants cannot survive the winter in northern latitudes because they are not native to the climate, and northern pines will eventually exhaust themselves and die in regions with year-round warmth because they rely on a period of winter dormancy. In an age dominated by colonialism, a trans-Atlantic slave trade, European missionaries in Asia, and well-financed nautical expeditions to the South Sea Islands and New Holland, it was a matter of both scientific and practical interest to understand the effects of such global transplantings: could Europeans survive the heat of the Tropics? Would they turn brown or even black? Would Africans become whiter after generations spent out of the African sun, eating and drinking the fruits of the Americas? Whatever the answers to these questions might be – and most environmental determinists before Kant assumed that biological adaptation would in fact occur given enough time – it was more or less agreed on all hands that every people did best in their native land.

#### 4.0 KANT'S THEORY OF RACIAL DIFFERENCE

In Kant's 1775 essay on racial difference, he proposed a mechanism for understanding inheritance that could also bring typological stability to racial taxonomy. As a monogenesist, Kant accepted the criterion established by Buffon for understanding species membership, namely, the ability to produce fertile offspring. Given the fact that humans of all shades and physiognomies had populated the Earth from one extreme to the other, the question was how this could have been possible. Kant's suggestion was simple. There had to have been a set of natural provisions for adaptation that was present in the first inhabitants of the earth. As humans migrated to the various regions of the globe, they adapted to the soil and climate in a manner that made them, over time, truly native to the land in which they lived. Kant called these original biological provisions 'germs and natural predispositions' with the key proviso that once an adaptation had been completed, the other germs – for whiteness or cold-hardiness, say – their adaptive potential would be extinguished by the now-dominant germ line. This, Kant argued, explained not only the inheritance of racial

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<sup>39</sup> Ethnological approaches to foreign peoples were being established especially by German historians, like Schlözer, working in Göttingen in the 1750s. See Hans Vermeulen, *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (University of Nebraska Press 2015).

characteristics, but their resilience in the face of both geographical transplanting and mixed-race breeding.<sup>40</sup>

Like all race theorists of the time, Kant was also concerned to offer some discussion of the basis of colour itself. That is, to say that the climate functioned as an occasioning cause was a point upon which all agreed, but there was little consensus beyond that with respect to the specific biological mechanisms driving skin colouration. Reasoning that different regions would see differences in the chemical components of water and soil (and thus food), Kant suggested that colouration occurred in response to the body's secretion of these compounds. For example, when describing American and Asian Indians, Kant explains that

the red-brown colour appears (as an effect of aerial acid) to be suitable to the cold climate, as the olive-brown colour (as an effect of the alkaline-bilious nature of the fluids) to the hot regions.

Regarding Africans, it is the iron particles

which are precipitated in the reticular substance through the evaporation of the phosphorous acid (of which all Negroes stink), that cause the black colour showing through the upper thin skin.<sup>41</sup>

All such specifics aside, Kant still stayed within the long-established connection between the humours and their geographically based climactic causes. Thus, as he listed the four races, they represented adaptations from an original pair – which Kant speculated to have been ‘white brunettes’ as the likely closest to the phyletic species – in the following division:

*First race* High Blondes (Northern Europeans) from humid cold.

*Second race* Copper-reds (Americans) from dry cold.

*Third race* Blacks (Senegambia) from humid heat.

*Fourth race* Olive-yellows (Indians) from dry heat.

What must be held in mind here is the manner in which individual races were shaped by their lands in a manner that affected not simply their visible characteristics, but their way of being in general. Just as certain plants will droop during the heat of the day in order to reduce their surface area and control evaporation, the case of humans is no different since climate similarly drives the relative energy outputs of any given region's inhabitants. This might sound reasonable, even right, at first glance. It becomes pernicious, however, once whole populations can be written off,

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<sup>40</sup> I outline the specifics regarding Kant's theories of geographic distribution and racial differentiation in ‘From Crooked Wood to Moral Agent: Connecting Anthropology and Ethics in Kant’ (2014) 2(1) *Estudos Kantianos* 185.

<sup>41</sup> Immanuel Kant, ‘Of the Different Races of Human Beings’ in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 92–3 at 2:438.

as they were by Kant, as idle, lazy, prone to dancing, drunkenness, promiscuity, and so on; assessments made against background assumptions and even direct claims regarding white Europe's geographically induced biological superiority as witnessed by its energetic achievements in the sciences and arts, as Kant put it: 'the white race contains all incentives and talents in itself'.<sup>42</sup>

### 5.0 TEMPERAMENT AND DIFFERENCE WITHIN KANT'S LECTURES ON ANTHROPOLOGY

Within Kant's Anthropology course, the move to a discussion of the characteristics of peoples according to their gender, ethnicity, and race, took place under the heading 'On the Way of Cognizing the Interior of the Human Being from the Exterior'. What followed from this heading was a complicated schema (and one that was continually evolving during the course of Kant's lectures), regarding a division between 'natural' and 'moral' characteristics – glossed by Kant as the difference between 'what nature makes of man' and 'what man can make of himself' – although neither set could be said to be either clearly biologically based or truly free from such material constraints. The hinge between these divisions would typically be one's 'temperament' so far as it served as a 'covertly contributing cause' to one's character as a whole. As Kant understood it,

From a *physiological* point of view, when one speaks of temperament one means *physical constitution* (strong or weak build) and *complexion* (fluid elements moving regularly through the body by means of the vital power, which also includes heat or cold in the treatment of these humours).

However, considered *psychologically*, that is, when one means temperament of soul (faculties of feeling and desire), those terms borrowed from the composition of the blood will be introduced only in accordance with the analogy that the play of feelings and desires has with corporeal causes of movement (the most prominent of which is blood).<sup>43</sup>

With this definition in hand, Kant could go on to discuss the various temperaments in play according to whether someone had light or heavy blood (sanguine vs. melancholic feeling) or hot or cold blood (choleric vs. phlegmatic energy levels) and the many different means by which the various humours could combine to produce one or other recognisable character.

I have already mentioned in passing that once the Anthropology lecture course began in 1772–73, the discussion of Europe was removed from the Physical Geography course. This presented Kant with a special difficulty when discussing 'National Character'. While Montesquieu had supported the effects of the environment when it came

<sup>42</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Menschenkunde (1781–1782)' in Robert Loudon and Allen Wood (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press 2012) 289 at 321 at 25:1187.

<sup>43</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View' in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöller (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 231 at 385 at 7:286. An excellent account of temperament in Kant's *Observations* essay is in Alix Cohen's, 'Kant's "Curious Catalogue of Human Frailties" and the Great Portrait of Nature' in Susan Shell and Richard Velkley (eds) *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge University Press 2012) 144.



to forming a national character, Hume had famously disagreed, insisting that it was the political life of a society that instead shaped a nation's character. For his own part, Kant seemed unsure.<sup>44</sup> Given the origin of this part of the new Anthropology course, there was already a strong environmentalism at work in his discussions of the European states. The exceptions were provided by France and England, two nations which seemed to be shaped more by their cultures than their geography. That issue aside, Kant was committed to a discussion of 'moral character' as a product of the human being's capacity for self-discipline, as the product, in other words, of freedom. And this seemed to be necessarily distinct from one's body, let alone geographical location.

A careful reading of the student notes taken during Kant's lectures on Anthropology, in addition to the lectures that were authorised by Kant for publication in 1798 under the title *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*,<sup>45</sup> demonstrates the following. While Kant might have been facing a technical difficulty in reconciling his reliance on the *empirical* observation of bodily based characteristics on the one hand, and the simultaneous appeal to the man of good will whose self-discipline meant that he was capable of acquiring an *intelligible* 'moral character', on the other hand – a character thus constituting a genuine 'second nature', as Kant put it, so far as it was capable of supplanting or at least redirecting man's native temperaments – this conflation of the empirical and the intelligible seemed to be a problem for Kant only when it came to white European males. For non-European 'whites' – Arabs, Turks, Persians – for non-white races, and for all women, of any race, European or not, these bodies of difference were barriers to the generation of a character capable of freely adopting a self-imposed moral law.<sup>46</sup> This is clear in the contrast between Kant's discussions, say, of a European nation's love of delicacies, and the manner in which Africans are described in the style of fauna in a natural history textbook: 'The Negroes of Senegal eat plants that have not yet completely decomposed and soil that the Senegal River tosses up on the banks as sludge, which contains some fat.'<sup>47</sup> Kant's continual remarks, moreover, regarding the 'low-energies' and 'half-extinguished life force' of various peoples, left no doubt in the minds of his audience

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Kant's remarks at 7:313. A helpful discussion of just this point is by Robert Loudon, 'National Character Via the Beautiful and Sublime?' in Susan Shell and Richard Velkley (eds) *Kant's Observations and Remarks: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge University Press 2012) 198.

<sup>45</sup> Kant above note 13.

<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting, in other words, that while Kant was immediately criticised for having proven that anthropology was in fact 'impossible' if it was supposed to be a report on the human as a product of both material and spiritual forces, the critics entirely missed the fact that Kant's was in effect a report only on one small segment of human life so far as white European males were alone supposed to be capable of moral self-determination in the first place. See, for example, Friedrich Schleiermacher's 1798 review of Kant's lectures, 'Anthropologie von Immanuel Kant' (1798) 2(2) *Athenaeum* 303. For some discussion of Schleiermacher's review, see Brian Jacobs, 'Kantian Character and the Problem of a Science of Humanity' in Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds) *Essays on Kant's Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press 2003) 105 at 117f.

<sup>47</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Lecture of the Winter Semester 1784–85 Based on the Transcription *Mrongovius, Marienburg*' in Robert Loudon and Allen Wood (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Anthropology* (Cambridge University Press 2012) 339 at 449 at 25:1415.

regarding the biological grounds underlying their supposed incapacity for moral advancement. ‘One still finds such a life in Tahiti,’ Kant explained to his class,

where laziness dominates all the inhabitants, as the sea offers them fish and fruits give them their bread. Even their fishing is also an idleness that only appears to be busy.<sup>48</sup>

## 6.0 ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHICS IN THE 1780S

These were comments made during the Winter semester 1784–85, the same time-frame within which Kant was drafting his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.<sup>49</sup> It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Kant repeated the point in the *Groundwork*, this time in the form of a negative lesson regarding the sin of ‘Rusting Talents’, one of Kant’s four iconic examples of moral failure or success. Here Kant cautioned readers against willing a life of ease and tranquility for ‘even if human beings (like the South Sea Islanders) should let their talents rust and be intent on devoting their lives merely to idleness, amusement, procreation, in a word, to enjoyment’, a rational agent

cannot possibly will that this become a universal law of nature, or as such be placed in use by a natural instinct. For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all capacities in him be developed, because they serve him and are given to him for all sorts of possible purposes.<sup>50</sup>

With this comment we have a clear case of the kind of ‘penetration’ into the critical philosophy that had been sought after by Mills. For just as Kant’s attention to temperament in the Anthropology lectures introduced us to the human being as both the result of material forces and – at least in the case of white European males – as somehow capable of transcending them, Kant’s insertion of an anthropological aside in the *Groundwork* serves as a potent reminder to his readers of the distinction between his intended audience, one tasked with the kind of individual development of talents that was central to the ‘vocation of mankind’, and those others whose bodies placed them outside the moral framework altogether.

I noted earlier Kant’s similar comments regarding the Tahitians in the review of Herder’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity*<sup>51</sup> that Kant published in two parts during 1785 – comments asking Herder to demonstrate the purpose of any group whose central objective appeared to be enjoyment, asking why indeed such idle humans, and not simply happy sheep and cattle, should even exist – but we can draw a separate line of connection to the *Groundwork*

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<sup>48</sup> As above at 504 at 25:1422. In an earlier lecture Kant explained that:

If a people in no way improves itself over centuries, then one may assume that there already exists in it a certain natural predisposition which it is not capable of exceeding

in ‘Menschenkunde (1781–1782)’ as above at 289 at 315 at 25:1181.

<sup>49</sup> Kant above note 25.

<sup>50</sup> As above at 75 at 4:423.

<sup>51</sup> Kant above note 18.

via this text. In his review of Herder, Kant had wished for someone with ‘a historic-critical mind’, a scholar who could produce a reliable anthropology ‘from the immeasurable multiplicity of ethnographic descriptions or travel narratives, and all their conjectural records belonging to human nature’.<sup>52</sup> This was something that Kant seems to have still had in mind when publishing an essay only a few months later on a ‘Conjectural Beginning of Human History’.<sup>53</sup> Here Kant shifted the focus away from a history of mankind that was dependent upon a similar set of contradictory and conjectural records, since this sort of history would amount to no more than a ‘fiction’. In its place, Kant proposed a history of mankind’s beginnings so far as these could be gleaned from the nature of freedom itself, a nature that remained unchanged between its first appearance and today, as he put it:

A history of freedom’s first development, from its original capacities in the nature of man, is therefore something different from the history of freedom’s progression, which can only be based on records.<sup>54</sup>

Signalling his commitment to the monogenesis of the human species, Kant begins the essay with a single pair and places them in the Garden of Eden in an effort to recast the biblical tale as an adventure of human reason. The connection to the just-published *Groundwork* becomes immediately evident once Kant explains that mankind’s exit from Eden was occasioned by the birth of reason, a birth signalled by reason’s simultaneous recognition of two truths. First, that human life represents the final end of nature, and this means that humans have dominion over their fellow creatures on earth. Second, that this dominion does not extend to other humans, since they too represent the end of nature, and must be treated accordingly. Paraphrasing one of the *Groundwork*’s central formulations of the moral law, Kant declares that with this recognition

the human being had entered in an *equality with all rational beings*, of whatever rank they might be (Genesis 3:22), namely in regard to the claim of *being himself an end*, of also being esteemed as such by everyone else, and of being used by no one merely as a means to other ends.

Despite such rational recognition of a universal equality among humankind, Kant warns his readers that the ‘*release* of the human being from the mother’s womb of nature’ would be fraught with misery and despair, that indeed it would be considered in retrospect to have been both a moral fall and a physical punishment.<sup>55</sup> Why? Because, as Kant formulates it, while recognition of equality marks the birth of the free use of human reason, it also inaugurates the history of human freedom in its temporal progression on earth. And this history is run through by

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<sup>52</sup> As above at 139 at 8:61–62.

<sup>53</sup> Kant above note 23.

<sup>54</sup> As above at 163 at 8:109.

<sup>55</sup> As above 168 at 8:114.

the harsh realities of social and political inequality. Kant casts this as leading to a chronic tension between the moral and natural aspects of human life, with the former playing either catch-up or scold to the latter. But while this all leads one to wish that ‘he could dream or fritter away his existence in tranquil equality or constant peace’, Kant argues that inequality drives competition and the progressive development of one’s talents, and is thus a good thing.<sup>56</sup> This is true, moreover, in cases of even the worst form of ‘inequality among men, not inequality in natural gifts or in good fortune, but rather in their rights as humans’.<sup>57</sup> For nature has not condemned man to this inequality forever, only until the history of human freedom has progressed to the point of its fully externalised expression in ‘civil right’. Until then we must wait and bear with fortitude and restraint even the collateral costs of a spreading European culture via colonial conquest and dominion, since ‘[w]ith this epoch began also the inequality among human beings, this rich source of so much evil, but also of all good, and it increased ever further’.<sup>58</sup>

### 7.0 WHY KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY STILL MATTERS TODAY

What then are we finally to make of Kant’s universalism? I take the answer to this to be fairly straightforward. In the same way that the American Declaration of Independence, for example, has inspired generations of people with its invocation of universal equality – an invocation certainly well ahead of the document’s own historical times – we must take Kant’s universalism for what it is: an approach to morality whose own claims undermine the racist provincialism on display in Kant’s works. This will not exonerate Kant, for Kant was well aware of competing narratives regarding the capacities of non-whites. Admitting his reliance on second-hand reports, he complained that all manner of conclusions had been reached regarding the character and fitness of non-European peoples, such that

Now from a multiplicity of descriptions of countries one can prove, if one wants to, that Americans, Tibetans, and other genuine Mongolian peoples have no beard, but also, if it suits you better, that all of them are by nature bearded and only pluck them out; that Americans and Negroes are each a race, sunk beneath the remaining members of the human species in their mental predispositions, but on the other side, by just as apparent records, that as regards their natural predispositions, they are to be estimated equal to every other inhabitant of the world; so it remains to the choice of the philosopher,

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<sup>56</sup> As above at 168 at 8:115.

<sup>57</sup> As above at 170 at 8:118 n.

<sup>58</sup> As above at 172 at 8:119. The notion that good comes out of evil is a constant point made in Kant’s lectures on anthropology given Kant’s sense that humans are driven by native self-love and must work to develop love instead for the moral law. In this essay (at 169 at 8:115), the sentiment is expressed thus:

The history of *nature* thus begins from good, for that is the *work of God*; the history of *freedom* from evil, for it is the *work of the human being*.

Kant says, as to how to erect a system on anything other than a foundation of ‘rickety hypotheses’.<sup>59</sup> That is to say, Kant was aware of positive racial characterisations but as we know by now, he chose to report on findings which supported his negative views; he even, as Patrick Freieron puts it, ‘fought *against* more generous portrayals of other races’ when these conflicted with them.<sup>60</sup> This is evident, for example, in Kant’s 1788 essay ‘On the Use of Teleological Principles’,<sup>61</sup> where he speaks against the abolitionist James Ramsay’s efforts to convince planters ‘to use all Negro slaves as free laborers’ because, as Kant elaborates on the position of Ramsay’s antagonist, James Tobin, there had never been an instance ‘among the many thousand freed Negroes’ where they could be said to have been engaged in real labour:

Rather that, when they are set free, they soon abandon an easy craft which previously as slaves they had been forced to carry out, and instead become hawkers, wretched inn-keepers, lackeys, and people who go fishing and hunting, in a word, tramps.<sup>62</sup>

Kant explains this, as usual, by way of the Negro’s innate predisposition to laziness given an original adaptation to a land of abundance, i.e. he explains it by way of an account that was consistent with the environmental determinism at work in the teaching of both the Physical Geography and Anthropology courses. Ramsay’s own piece – translated into German in the same compilation as Tobin’s – contained numerous positive characterisations of Negroes alongside graphic details regarding the miserable conditions and great cruelty suffered by the slaves at the hands of their slave owners.<sup>63</sup> Kant, however, still chose to endorse Tobin since he confirmed prejudices that we know to have been established in Kant’s mind since his reading of Hume on this same point in the mid-1760s. And, lest we forget, the entire point of the 1788 essay ‘On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy’ was to demonstrate the means by which Kant had avoided a foundation of ‘rickety hypotheses’ when establishing his own philosophical anthropology, namely, teleology.

But even if we are unable to exonerate Kant himself, it seems to me that we are still free to understand Kant’s conceptions of human dignity and respect for the moral law as applying equally to each of us, regardless of whether we would have been counted as members of Kant’s intended audience or not. For the language of universal moral worth – especially so far as it can be plausibly extricated from Christian considerations of the human soul – still offers us a conceptual tool of the kind that can be helpful when combatting the ongoing problems of racism and misogyny today. While Kant is certainly impugned by his own moral standards – a point that specialists should

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<sup>59</sup> Immanuel Kant, ‘Review of J.G. Herder’s *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity*’ in Robert Loudon and Günter Zöllner (eds) *Immanuel Kant: Anthropology, History, and Education* (Cambridge University Press 2007) 121 at 139 at 8:62.

<sup>60</sup> Patrick Freieron, *Kant’s Questions: What is the Human Being?* (Routledge 2013) 107.

<sup>61</sup> Kant above note 26.

<sup>62</sup> As above at 209 at 8:174. My thanks to Jameliah Shorter for pointing out Kant’s footnote in connection to this point, and for providing me with the right historical sources when tracking Kant’s references.

<sup>63</sup> M C Sprengel (ed), *Beiträge zur Völker und Länderkunde* [Contributions to the Study of Peoples and Countries] vol 5 (Weygandischen Buchhandlung 1786).

not refrain from making – the standards themselves are not axiomatically tainted as well. As for the questions raised at the opening of this discussion, here I think that it is not only possible but indeed necessary for Kant scholars to avoid any reflexive shying away from Kant’s racism, particularly when it comes to identifiable points of connection between his negative attitudes and the writings from the mid-1780s. There is a lot to say, for example, about Kant’s emphasis on ‘rusting talents’ in his moral theory, and it seems to me that we are enjoined as scholars to include a sense of its broader connotations when teaching or otherwise discussing Kant’s position. Thus, while I would argue that the ultimate value of the moral theory is independent of Kant’s personal prejudices, the key is to be clear-eyed in identifying these when they might seem to form the backdrop of a given text. It is simply astounding to us that Kant himself appears to have seen no difficulty in reconciling his universal moral theory with the faith he appears to have had in colonialism’s role in promoting the best interests of the species. But even as we then sigh a breath of relief to discover that Kant later offered forceful condemnations of both colonialism and chattel slavery in the 1790s, and indeed removed his discussion of race from the published version of the Anthropology lectures in 1798, we must still point out that Kant’s condemnation of colonial practices grew out of his attention to the role played by ‘hospitality’ in global commercial exchanges, and not, therefore, on the basis of any explicit mention or connection made to his moral theory. And while we can be heartened by the sense of Kant’s new-found sympathy for those exploited under colonial rule, we must also remember that he allowed multiple republications of not only his essays on race, but of his ‘Observations on the Beautiful and Sublime’, of a text, in other words, that contained some of his most reprehensible comments regarding non-whites and women.<sup>64</sup>

It is this kind of balancing act that I think is required from us with respect to Kant. It is instructive here to compare Germany and the US in their respective treatment of their worst historical events: the Germans have made a point of remembering the Nazi period, of teaching their children about the Holocaust, and of working collectively to remember and learn from their past. The US, by contrast, only began to integrate discussions of the ongoing legacy of slavery into mainstream fare in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2016; discussions which have since lost momentum in the wake of Trump’s victory in the presidential race. If we do not work to acknowledge and assimilate Kant’s negative remarks into our understanding of his social and political philosophy, we risk two extremes: either the wholesale rejection of Kant’s theory as a racist project, or an epistemology of ignorance which either denies Kant’s racism altogether or dismisses it as only an artefact of the times. Neither of these options makes sense, and more importantly, neither affords us the ability to respond convincingly when a person who Kant would have clearly sacrificed to the aims of progressive history, asks: why should I study Kant at all?

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<sup>64</sup> The ‘Observations’ essay was republished as a standalone text in 1771 by Hartnoch in Riga, and in 1797 by Lenkam in Graz; it was also included in volume 2 of Johann Heinrich Tieftrunk (ed) *Immanuel Kants vermischte Schriften* (Halle 1799) at 347. The 1788 essay on teleology, and the two race essays from 1775 and 1785, were authorised by Kant for reprinting in 1793 (twice), 1795, 1797, and 1799.